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THEATRICAL PORTRAIT,

A

P O E M,

ON THE CELEBRATED

MRS. SIDDON'S, *K.*

IN THE CHARACTERS OF

CALISTA, } BELVIDERA,
JANE SHORE, } AND
 } ISABELLA,

L O N D O N:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS little Piece is presented to the Public with a View of drawing the Attention to reflect on the Morals and Sentiments contained in the different Plays alluded to—as well as portraying the inimitable Performances of Mrs SIDDONS; to keep awake in the Mind the various Virtues and Vices of each Character, that the One may be pursued with more Alacrity, and the Other shunned with the greater Detestation.

It need not be told to any but the plain and unlearned Reader, that the first Plays acted on the English Stage, were collected either from the Scriptures or historical Events recorded in Sacred History, at a Period when the Dawnings of Christianity

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ty began to spread over the Land, and disperse the gloomy Clouds of Heathenism and Idolatry. At this early Area, the Theatre was resorted to as a Place of Divine Exercise, and peculiarly devoted to Virtue and the Muses. In every Place where Theatres have been erected on this Plan, they have not only reformed the Manners, but refined the Ideas of the People. It was from those of this Kind, that ancient Rome owed all her Glory! They inspired her Sons with such Ideas of Heroism and Virtue, that they sacrificed even Life itself to excel in either—and thus became the Masters of the World! And may I not add, that Plays have in a great Measure infus'd that intrepid and daring Spirit into the Breasts of Englishmen which is unknown to all Nations but Ourselves! Our Poets never failing to introduce in their Pieces, Warriors of gallant Bearing, and Statesmen whose piercing Eyes can see beyond the Clouds!

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In short, the Theatres are Places of Vice and Dissipation to none but those who makes them such. Many go there to have their Passionswarmed, but few their Hearts ; some for Fashion's Sake, and some to pass away an idle Hour ; and of Course Depart as Simple as they went.

If the Theatres were shut because they are frequented by the Disorderly and Profane, on the same Grounds, we may close the Church Doors, and at once deprive the rising Generation of knowing Good from Evil, and let the World revolt back again to Ignorance and Superstition. No, rather throw the Doors wider open to admit base Characters than otherwise, for at the Worst they are Beasts of Reason, and have Souls as capable to rise in Virtue as sink in Vice.

Doubtless there are some Persons (more Pious than Wise,) who look upon the Stage as unhal-
lowed

lowed Ground, and dare not intrust themselves there; by which absurd Notion, they are more subject to become the Dupes of designing Villains and flattering Sycophants, than the rest of Mankind. For there we read Men~~not~~ and know the World: there being not a Virtue or a Vice that ever entered the Human Mind but is at Times hinted at and shewed in its proper Light and Colour.

The Theatres as they are at present governed, are the Glories of the Nation, the Fountains of our Liberties, the Encourages of every fine Art, patronizing Merit in every Line of Life, refine the Manners, improve the Taste, and are Enemies to nothing but Vice and Folly.

T H E
THEATRICAL PORTRAIT,
A
P O E M.

“ SING heavenly Muse!” ’tis SIDDONS charms the Ear,
Prompts the fond Sigh, and draws the pitying Tear.
You that delight and glory in the Stage,
Behold this Mirror of a polish’d Age
Behold her charm the silent wond’ring Throng; 5
With more than magic Art or Syren Song.
Whatever Ills the tragic Muse bemoan
The lovely SIDDONS makes each Scene her own.
At once by her are all the Sex portray’d,
The pious Matron or the love-sick Maid— 10

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The Female Patriot, whose avenging Deed
To save a Father, made a Tyrant bleed—
The lowly Penitent with piercing Sighs
Tears of Contrition bursting from her Eyes:
So after noon-tide Tempests have I seen
The setting Sun enamel all the Green;
With milder Beams the closing Day adorn,
While dropping Dews empearl the bending Corn.

In private Life she shines as on the Stage,
In both the Fav'rite of the Town and Age. 20
Describes in each a great—a glorious Course,
Gives Life to Language, or to Morals force.
Ye Critics, say, where most does SIDDONS shine,
In Love or Virtue, or in Parts divine?

C A L I S T A.

SEE fair CALISTA's penitential Woe! 25
Her Heart dissolves; her Eyes with Tears o'erflow;
Tortur'd with Anguish, and o'erwhelm'd with Care,
Her Breast the Seat of Horror and Despair!
She calls on Heaven to close the dismal Scene!
Invokes the Grave! and hails the dark Serene!

Here is a Lesson to the yielding Fair
 To 'scape the Danger, of each tempting Snare,
 To flee from Men whose Subtilty and Art
 Use baleful Methods to subdue the Heart,
 Then, like LOTHARIO, leave with loath'd Disgust 35
 The wretched Victims of their fated Lust.
 Surely I hear some happy rescu'd Fair
 With trembling Joy the glorious Cause declare
 (Who long had heard the false Philander's Tale,
 And nearly let his artful Plea prevail) 40
 " CALISTA's Sorrow fav'd my virgin Fame
 " Preserv'd my Virtue! kept my Soul from Shame!"
 Be dumb for ever each calumnious Tongue,
 Nor do the Stage or its Adherents Wrong!
 This is the School to know and read Mankind 45
 Refine the Manners and instruct the Mind;
 Shew the bad Heart in its terrific Light,
 And set at once our erring Reason right.
 Learn us to shun the Villain's wily Art
 And prize the Man who acts an honest Part. 50
 Ah! but for thee §, thou justly Great and Wise,
 We all had been the wretched Dupes of Vice,

Thy brighter Genius mark'd this noble Plan,
 " The proper Study of Mankind is Man." 55
 Thy Muse untaught by Greek or Roman Lore,
 Shines in the Language of its native Shore,
 Millions of Beauties catch the wond'ring Sight,
 And Strike the Senses with new Beams of Light:
 Nay, all thy Works in ev'ry Page and Part
 Exalt the Reason and improve the Heart. 60
 Far distant Lands confess thy Works divine
 And ev'ry Thought in ev'ry Age will shine.
 Nor thou alone! but other Bards, whose Muse
 Like thine a thousand different Gems diffuse
 Shall by her Aid to greater Glory rise, 65
 And make Mankind the Wonder of the Skies.
 Hail happy Day! that sees the wish'd for Hour,
 When Language charms with energetic Power.
 In SIDDONS shines the Muse of heav'nly Rowe
 And, like his Numbers, sweet her Accents flow. 70
 No more the Stage to mimic Jest confin'd
 To please the Fancy, shall debase the Mind,
 But lur'd by thee each Dupe of Vice and Strife.
 Shall wake to Virtue, and return to Life.
 Folly for ever quit the modern Stage, 75
 And Acts of Virtue charm a polish'd Age.

JANE SHORE.

LO! weeping Shore our next Attention draws,
 The hapless Object of inhuman Laws!
 Around the House she wafts the rising Sigh!
 And Tears of Pity fall from ev'ry Eye!
 View her depriv'd of Raiment, Houfe and Friend!
 A Wretch whose bleeding Sorrows know no End!
 Her lovely Tresses round her Shoulders flow,
 And livid Paleness paints her inward Woe.
 See her fine Form expos'd to open Air
 Fainting beneath the Aggregate of Care!
 And e'er in Death she close her weary Eyes,
 New Scenes of Sorrow in her Breast arise!
 An injur'd Husband shakes her feeble Frame,
 With the Remembrance of her Guilt and Shame!
 Whose fatal Presence sets her Soul on Fire—
 While Love and Shame alternately inspire!

80

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If we look round and view the House all o'er
 Shall we not find, at least one modern Shore?
 Does not fair SIDDONS many a Heart expose
 And sting some guilty Mind with bleeding Woes? 90
 Ye faithless Fair that stain the Marriage Bed
 Like wretched Shore from virtuous Husbands fled!
 Avoid these Scenes with most industrious Care,
 Least sudden Horror, seize you with Despair.
 SIDDONS strikes Home, will wound each tender Part 95
 Awake your Conscience, terrify your Heart;
 Inflict a Dagger in your guilty Breast,
 Poison your Joys, deprive your Soul of Rest:
 Haunt you all Day in ev'ry Place and Hour,
 Prey on your Vitals, ev'ry Hope devour. 100
 Make you with Grief your hapless State deplore
 Curse the bright Day, and wish you were no more!

And you, ye Fair enur'd to Vice and Shame,
 While sad Disease destroys your lovely Frame;
 Where Vice triumphant reigns without Controul 105
 Poisons each Spark of Virtue in the Soul;
 Gives loose to ev'ry lewd and vain Desire,
 And lights the Breast with an unhallow'd Fire!

Are not these Scehes, ye guilty Ones, your own?
 Go! with lost Shore and whisper Groan for Groan! 100
 O while these Sorrows labour in your Breast
 May you deny, your Souls or Peace or Rest
 Till true Contrition wash each guilty Stain,
 And turn your Hearts from all that's Lewd or Vain!
 As the poor Pris'ner bound with massy Chains 115
 Endures their Weight and yields them to their Pains,
 In longing Hope awaits the wish'd Reprieve
 That breaks his Fetters,—bids the Culprit live,
 Like him be blessed with a kind Release,
 And Heav'n salute you with the Kifs of Peace. 120

And you, ye virtuous FAIR, these Hints improve,
 Shun the gay Paths which lead to guilty Love.
 If you have Beauty, be your Actions Wise
 Watch o'er your Conduct with attentive Eyes:
 Let virtuous Precepts ever be your Guide, 125
 Oh ! fear to venture from fair Virtue's Side.
 If from her Sight you e'er should chance to stray,
 Her Path's so narrow you may lose your Way ;
 Vice is at Hand to strike her Vot'ries Blind
 Destroy the Body and corrupt the Mind; 130

Howe'er its Sweets look pleasant to your View
 Detest its Scenes and virtuous Paths pursue.

Oh! shun the Libertine's ensnaring Wiles,
 Abhor his Maxims and alluring Smiles;

140

Call in fair Virtue to your friendly Aid,
 Virtue, the Guardian of each wary Maid!

Virtue from Ruin will preserve your Fame
 Secure your Honor, and enhance your Name!

Then let this Theme employ your Heart and Tongue, 145
 O may they be the Tenor of your Song!

Your sole Delight thro' ev'ry Stage of Life
 Whether a Maid, a Mother or a Wife

To you they will the greatest Pleasure give
 Heav'n can bestow or Mortal can receive.

150

Come then and rest your ev'ry Pleasure here,
 Where Beauty blooming lasts throughout the Year.

Then will your Hours most sweetly glide along;
 And ev'ry Day your Joys be new and young.

Glory shall mark your Footsteps all your Days, 155
 And Fame immortal give you endless Praise!

and ye

Ye cruel Spoilers ! Murd'lers of the Fame,
 The Peace and Honor of the Virgin's Name !
 Ye gay LOTHARIOS ! lost to manly Sense,
 Of virtuous Minds the Terror and Offence. 160
 Can you behold Calista's bleeding Heart
 Set forth to view by SIDDONS magic Art,
 And not be struck with Horror and Surprize,
 When Scenes like these arrest your recreant Eyes ?
 O'er the black Scrole of violated Loves, 165
 With keen Remorse the tortur'd Mind revolves :
 Calls to Remembrance some deluded Fair ;
 Whose yielding Softness fell amid your Snare,
 Mourning in Silence midst the gloomy Shade,
 The verriest Wretch perfideous Man e'er made ! 170
 Who but for you might still have been careft,
 And smiling made some worthier Lover blest !
 But since she chanc'd from Virtue's Path to stray,
 Is like a loathfom Weed thrown quite away.
 How wretched he who does with open Eyes 175
 Walk in the dang'rous slipp'ry Path of Vice :
 Peace is remov'd from his malignatⁿ Breast,
 His wounded Conscience will not let him Rest ;

Reflection still his highest Bliss annoys,
 Weighs down his Spirits, poisons all his Joys,
 Destroys each Hope of e'er attaining Heav'n,
 Sinks him to Earth where's no Repentance giv'n ;
 But gloomy Death and Horror and Despair,
 Reign in eternal, dreadful Silence there.

180

B E L V I D E R A.

NOW from the Scenes of Woe and Death we rove, 185
 Into the Mazes of the God of Love !
 Lo Belvidera ! Yielding, Soft and Fair
 In Beauty's Bloom, and chaste as Morning Air,
 Attracts the Notice of each wand'ring Eye,
 Strikes dumb the Gods—and all their Murmurs die! 190
 Silent as Death, no jarring Discord's heard
 Eager to catch the Sound of ev'ry Word.
 Nor less attentive the sarcastic Pit;
 Charm'd with fair SIDDONS, lay aside their Wit.
 She fills with Ardor and poetic Fire
 The dullest Verse with her harmonious Lyre!

195

Does in each Bosom Admiration raise
 And all are Dumb with Wonder, Love and Praise!

Flow on, sweet Muse! thy pleasing Theme pursue,
 Like her be Just, and mark her Portrait true. 200
 Behold in her the virtuous melting Bride,
 Her Jaffier all her Glory and her Pride!
 Sweetly their Moments onward seem to move
 He is all Passion! and the Fair all Love! 205
 Nor could the World nor all its Cares deface
 Their happy Union, or their Joys erase,
 Till curs'd Revenge disturb'd their blest Repose,
 And turn'd the dearest Friends to seeming Foes.
 Domestic Broils their Joy and Peace devour 210
 And all their Blessings blasted in an Hour.
 Yet BELVIDERA thro' the Storm of Life,
 Remains the Faithful tho' forsaken Wife!
 Scorns to take Rest or close her weary Eyes,
 But quickly to her bleeding Lover flies! 215
 Raging with Madness, loud on Jaffier calls,
 And lo! with Grief the full blown Beauty falls!

Hard is the Heart whose Feelings melt not here
Or views these Scenes without a gushing Tear.

220

Did human Beings let their Passions sleep
Throw Nature by and here forget to Weep
Sure flinty Rocks would their Foundations shake,
And senseless Stocks their lasting Silence break ;
With loud Acclaim the Actress still pursue,
And yield the Palm of Merit where 'tis due!

225

How happy they, the happiest of their Kind!
Whose youthful Hearts in nuptial Bands are join'd !

✓ Thro' Life's tempestous Sea with Pleasure move,
Guided by Reason and the Helm of Love!

230

✓ Who, ere frail Nature Err or Passions rise,
And Anger shoots like Light'ning from their Eyes,
Think e're too late *one* Word may quite destroy
Love's gentle Reign, and poison ev'ry Joy.

235

Thus sooth'd the Cholar—Jarrs and Discords cease
And all their Life is crown'd with Joy and Peace!
Fools love and Wed, grow weary of their Wives,
And kill their Pleasures daily as they rise!

Far from the Perlieues of their Dwellings stray 240
And drive Content, their Household God away.

**Ye Fair, let not the Fool or Drunkard's Smile
(However Great) your wary Soul beguile!**

Turn a deaf Ear to all he does or says,

Nor be deluded with his fulsome Praise!

Liquor's a Door which lets a Monster in

Frought with a thousand, different Kinds of Sin

When Sense is drown'd from Guilt to Guilt he flie

And every Virtue in its Blossom dies !

But soft my Muse, to gentler themes remove
And paint the Pleasures known to virtuous Love!

Survey the Paths the Wise with Reason tread

Whose Minds are easy as their downy Bed.

Where new-born Pleasures bless each rising

And Life's smooth Current softly rolls away.

Thrice Happy Pair! whose Hearts unitely Fr

On all the Follies of the Court and Town ;

Who pleas'd with Scenes a Country Life affo

With murmuring Rivers, and with bleating Herds

Far from the busy World of Noise and Strife

Court the still Village and a rural Life!

There live estrang'd to Vice and ev'ry Ill
 The Great endure—till dire Diseases kill.
 Who free from Snares of Flatt'ry and Deceit,
 Enjoy plain Nature in this blest Retreat.

265

Soon as the Sun is from his Bed releas'd,
 And darts his Glories from the ruddy East,
 Or early Lark from off his Hillock rise,
 And flies exulting, warbling thro' the Skies!
 The Happy Pair their gentle Slumbers break,

270

And to new Joys with grateful Minds awake!

Did righteous Heav'n leave me, my Lot to chos'e
 This to accept, or that as free refuse,
 In some lone Cot with Laura I wou'd dwell,
 That would the Rain, and raging Winds repell,

275

Tho' course my Fare, and Raiment meanly Good,
 I'd rest Content in Valley, Hill or Wood;
 There like a Hermit we would spend our Days,
 And in lone Silence breath our Maker's Praise!

I S A B E L L A.

AGENTLER Theme the Soaring Muse inspires 280
 Melts all the Passions and the Bosom fires!

Lo! I S A B E L L A, all her Wishes crost,
 The hapless Mourner of a Husband lost;
 Nor this alone, with him her Fortune flies
 And ev'ry other worldly comfort dies. 285

Her tender Infant all her Care employs,
 Life of her Life, and Soul of all her Joys!
 She sees in him his Father's Image rise,
 And all her Soul is in her ravish'd Eyes;

A thousand Torments rack her lab'ring Mind 290
 And tempt her Soul to curse all Humankind!

Reflects that once she was a happy Wife
 BIRON the Joy and Pleasure of her Life
 But now alas! each Hope is cank'ring Care;

The Present Hour a Scene of black Despair! 295
 Then to his Sire her little One she bears,
 And pleads his hapless Fate with Nature's Tears;

Rends his hard Heart, his cold Affections move,
 And wakes his Soul to Tenderness and Love.
 But while her Eyes with rising Joy runs o'er— 300
 She is forbid to see her Infant more:
 Thus like a Vessel just attain'd the Shore,
 When boist'rous Winds and raging Tempests roar,
 Driven from the Beach back to Sea again,
 To beat the Surges of the raging Main—
 From Door to Door she'd with her Infant stray, 305
 And beg his Bread than this Command obey.
 To righteous Heav'n She makes her humble Pray'r,
 To take her hapless Orphan to its Care.
 " Let me bear all—but here let Mercy mild
 " Shed its kind Influence—and spare the Child. 310
 Lo! faithful VILL'ROY on the Fair attends,
 The tend'rest Lover and the best of Friends
 Soothes her sad Heart would fain her Grief remove
 And change her Woe to Happiness and Love!
 She but replies in deep Affliction's Wave 315
 " My Joys are bury'd in my Biron's Grave."
 Till by his Bounty she is overcome
 And only Weds to give her Child a Home—

The Storm abates—the Tempest sleeps awhile
 And fickle Fortune takes her Turn to smile; 320
 Sweet balmy Peace sheds forth a glimm'ring Ray,
 And Plenty drives the Fear of Want away.
 A little Space lie bury'd all her Woes,
 While Joys tumultuous VILL'ROY's Breast o'er flows:
 His Passions burn with Love and soft Desire, 325
 —Beauty excites, and Reason fans the Fire!
 Extatic Bliss his gentler Senses move
 And his whole Soul is Harmony and Love!
 But e'er bright Sol had shut the gates of Day,
 Or Cynthia shed her palid silver Ray. 330
 Fate's direful Book again is open'd wide
 And snatches Vill'roy from his lovely Bride!
 Poor Isabella, shakes with trembling Fear
 Lest some unseen foreboding Evil's near:
 Like a poor Bird that's 'scap'd the Fowler's Snare 335
 Where'er she treads, thinks that the Danger's there,
 Shuns the sad Place, and flies a distant Road
 And lives and sings in a more safe Abode!
 But Isabella's sad prophetic Soul
 On past Events—and future Sorrows roll; 340

In vain from this or that Affliction flies,
Fast as they sink a thousand others rise !

Behold lost Biron, long estrang'd from Home,
With Love and eager Expectation come
To take his Isabella to his Arms,
And sweetly revel in her beauteous Charms:
To gain Admittance sends the Pledge of Love—
Nor doubts but that will ev'ry Bar remove—
What are the Thoughts of Isabella now?
Now in her Hand she holds the fatal Vow ?
Poor innocent, unhappy, wretched Fair !

In wild Distraction rends her flowing Hair:
But when her Biron comes—to Grief a Prey,
Her sinking Soul in Silence dies away :
Wak'd by his Strains again she turns to Life
And tells him still she is his faithful Wife.
Then from his Arms like foul Pollution flies,
Whilst her dark Hints—his anxious Soul surprize
Amaz'd he stands with Wonder, Bliss and Pain,
Concludes her False—or Love has turn'd her Brain: 360
Impatient waits the mournful Cause to know
From whence her Sorrows and Distraction flow,

345

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355

But when he hears the dreadful Story told,

From Self-destruction he can scarce withhold :

" Alas! he cries, are thus my Toils repaid

365

" For sleepless Nights, where ceaseless Sighs pervade :

" The galling Yoke and wretched Slav'ry bore

" Cheer'd with the Hope of being bless'd once more

" With Isabella—Joy of all my Life,

" The tenderest Mother and the kindest Wife.

370

" In the fierce Fight contending with the Foe,

" Inspir'd by her I dealt each fatal Blow;

" Clove each Assailant bleeding to the Ground,

" And rose superior to each deadly Wound."

Thus Ills on Ills the wretched Pair attend,

And Fate pursues them till their Beings end,

375

He from a Villain's Hand receives his Death,

And the drawn Dagger drinks her vital Breath:

Th' unhappy Sire now hears the dismal Tale,

And filial Tears, o'er long Disgust prevail;

Mourns that so long Deceived he had been,

380

And brooding Sorrow shuts the fatal Scene!

Siddons pursue the glorious Work divine;
To copy Nature let the Task be thine!

Each growing Grace and Sentiment impart
That warms the Passions and amends the Heart

Long live to charm and captivate the Soul

Correct the Manners, and refine the whole
System of Virtue, Honor, Truth and Love

And make us equal with the Gods above.

Then Vice, the ruling Passion of the Mind

Will to its native Regions be confin'd;

Pride and Oppression, Ign'rance and Deceit,

Lie prostrate bowing low at Virtue's Feet

Whose placid Beams will shed a heav'nly Ray,

And make the burning passions mild as May.

385

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F I N I S.

